

# **IFRAO 2018**

## **3D - New research in the rock art traditions of the Alps**

### **D3 - Consolata**

#### **Anthropomorphe cruciform study**

**Pascal Pannetier – 1 september 2018**

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## Reasons for my research

To understand the results of my study you will have to put aside your ideological baggage and preconceived ideas, we enter a mode of thought that is several millennia and is very different from ours. My research began a few years ago with the study of the stone of “Feissons-sur-Salins” in the Tarentaise Valley in Savoie France.

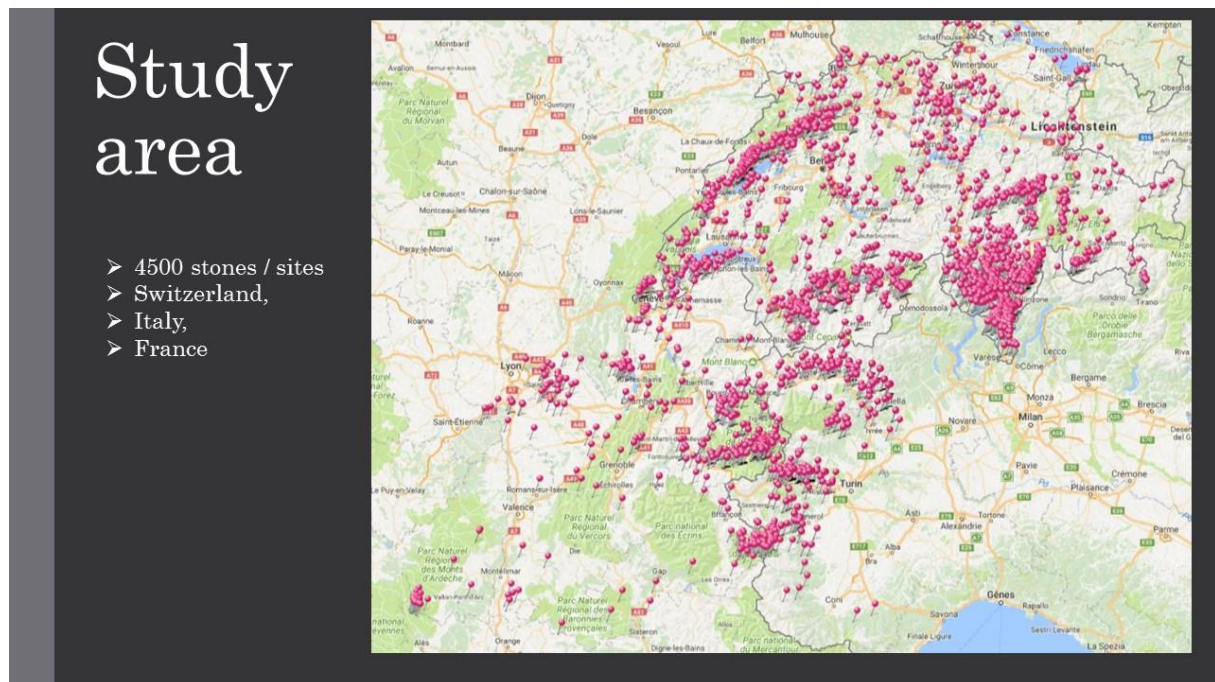
### Start of my research



Feissons-sur-Salin (73) Savoie France (Pierre de Feissons)

This cup stone has many engravings including cruciform engravings rather special. I have since deepened this subject, which allowed me to understand it better and to bring together a certain number of elements that I will summarize here for the case of engraved cruciform.

## My research on cup stones and their engravings



To progress in my research I read and inventoried existing knowledge and established from known data, database sites and accessible images. I focused primarily on the Alpine area in France Switzerland and Italy, with extension in France to the Jura, the Massif Central and the Pyrenees and then extended now also my research to North of Spain.

## Research on cruciforms

Researches in Italy, Switzerland, France, Spain have been carried out on engraved crosses. Many since the 60s have concluded Christian historical engravings, in a context of Christianization. One of the Italian studies is legible on the rock website, an article from the bulletin of the Piedmontese Society of Archeology, published in 1998, pp. 19-39. Despite many doubts raised in this study, the authors did not dare to equate the cruciforms with anthropomorphs, except to mention that these cruciforms are in fact probably anthropomorphs unfinished. The most complete study is that of the Spanish Julián MARTINEZ GARCIA, in 2003, "Grabados rupestres in megalíticos soportes, Su influencia in the estudios of rock art".

In these studies it is shown that similar or similar drawings of the rock engravings are present at historical times. Lintels of doors, engraving of walls of castles or churches or for Muslim Spain in cisterns.

But doubts still persist and some researchers in Italy, France, Switzerland and the Iberian Peninsula regularly make interesting findings. Like Robert Guiraud and Franca Mari page 145 of the Alpine Prehistoric Studies Bulletin published by the Aosta Prehistoric Studies Society 1969-1970. All of these researches as a whole have been serious and of high quality, but have been carried out for some with still limited and partial knowledge of the subject, with a lack of strong points of comparison and doubts have too often been in the conclusions, put to the benefit of the thesis that all cruciform forms are historical for recent studies. The lack of evidence and dating has so far failed to settle this debate. A

study in Spain of FORTEA, JAVIER, on the province of Jaén, in 1971, proposed to date cruciform engravings of - 1000 to -600 BC.

Yet at least one proof exists for cruciform pre-Christian engravings since the excavation of Paul Du Chatellier in 1876, on the tumulus of Renongar in Plovan (Finistère), where many of the inaccessible slabs, including cruciform, a set dated from Neolithic medium / final.

In Switzerland, research and inventories conducted by archaeologists in Ticino, including those of Franco Binda, showed us some figures as early as 1978:

- Ticino Switzerland on 292 stones engraved with signs:

  - 75% have cups, 13.4% Greek cross, 0.8% Latin crosses,

- Italian Grison on 179 stones engraved with signs:

  - 77% have cups, 13.9% Greek cross, 1% Latin crosses.

Switzerland have the most public detailed database on this subject, with many photos, a base that is available to all (but in German). By reworking and translating these data I was able to assemble them and standardize them with those of French and Italian base researchers. It took me a lot of time and work to bring this scattered data together with others to get a roughly geo-localized overview, a little more complete covering the Northern Alps in France, Italy and Switzerland. The quality of information is quite variable, and important information is missing, but it still allows a first approach.

Many cupules exist in these 3 countries. More than 4000 stones in this study area, among them, a little more than 10% or several hundred of them have cruciform. They have benefited little from general studies until then, and the systematic assimilation of the crosses to Christianization has greatly hampered their study.

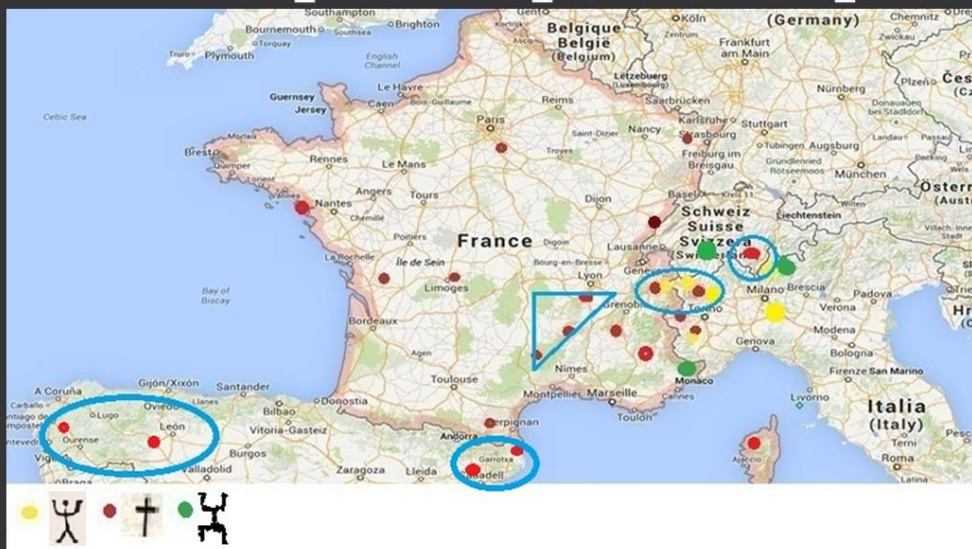
The crosses engraved on these stones in Swiss are mainly of Greek type (with branches equal to more than 90%). For other countries the quality of the data is not enough to say it, but this seems less the case.

# Cruciform analysis

Italy			All 3 countries		
Cup stones	504	706 71%	Cup stones	3013	4272 71%
Ringed cupstones or labyrinths	17	706 2%	Ringed cupstones or labyrinths	151	4272 4%
Stones with linear engravings	199	706 28%	Stones with linear engravings	699	4272 16%
Stones with historical crosses	18	706 3%	Stones with historical crosses	241	4272 6%
Stones with potential prehistoric crosses	28	706 4%	Stones with potential prehistoric crosses	460	4272 11%
Stones with cupulated crosses	22	706 3%	Stones with cupulated crosses	86	4272 2%
Stones with cross in phy or crossbow	7	706 1%	Stones with cross in phy or crossbow	39	4272 1%
France			Suisse		
Cup stones	639	872 73%	Cup stones	1870	2694 69%
Ringed cupstones or labyrinths	102	872 12%	Ringed cupstones or labyrinths	32	2694 1%
Stones with linear engravings	119	872 14%	Stones with linear engravings	381	2694 14%
Stones with historical crosses	17	872 2%	Stones with historical crosses	206	2694 8%
Stones with potential prehistoric crosses	176	872 20%	Stones with potential prehistoric crosses	256	2694 10%
			Stones with potential prehistoric latin crosses	54	2694 2%
			Stones with potential prehistoric greek crosses	202	2694 7%
Stones with cupulated crosses	10	872 1%	Stones with cupulated crosses	34	2694 1%
Stones with cross in phy or crossbow	25	872 3%	Stones with cross in phy or crossbow	7	2694 0%

The distribution of engraved cruciform

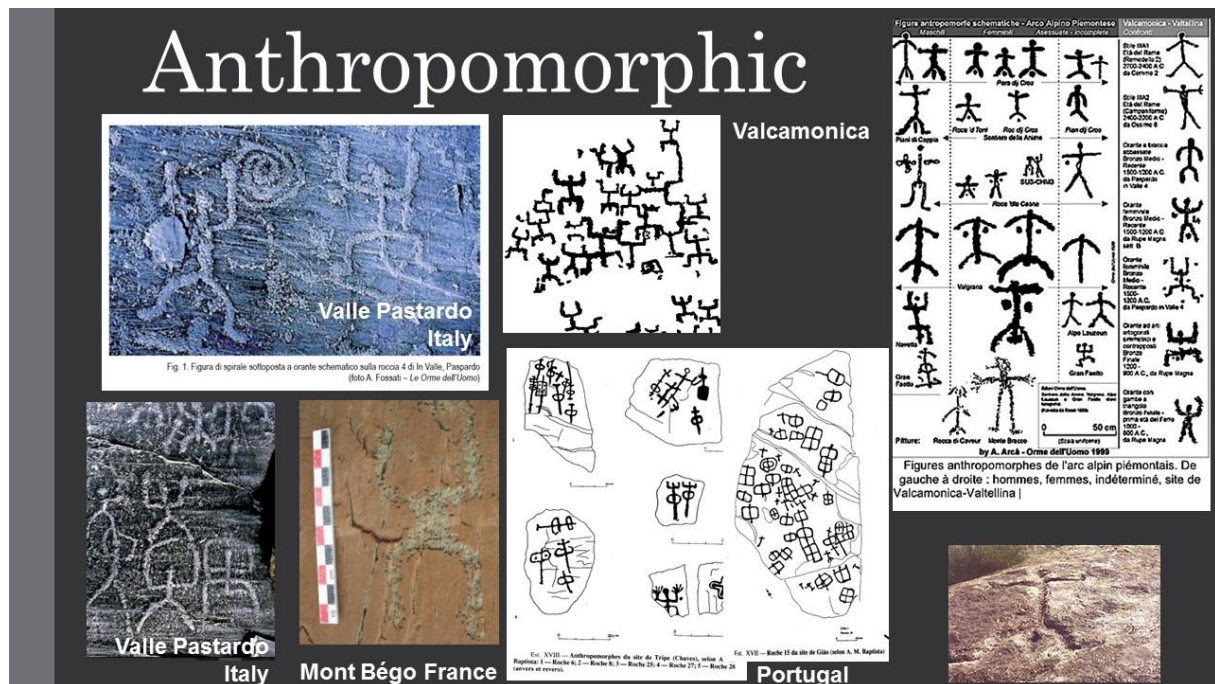
## Anthropomorphic maps



The cruciform engravings are not evenly distributed, there are regions where they are in large numbers, and others where there are none or very few. The regions with strong concentrations are for Switzerland Ticino, for Italy the north-east, in France it is Savoie and the southern and eastern parts of the Massif Central, a little west of the Pyrenees. Cruciform engravings are particularly related to cup-shaped stones but on a much smaller area. The mountain areas are the most represented, in France,

Italy and Switzerland, there are probably cultural reasons or conservation to this observation. On the other hand, none in the Southern Alps. There is also a very important cruciform zone north of the Iberian Peninsula in lower elevation areas.

If we look geographically at the distribution of anthropomorphic engravings, we find zones of different distributions according to types and styles. Zones are often exclusive, with the exception of a few cases of limited diversity in areas of cultural boundaries



Anthropomorphs are strong markers of culture, there are different variants and we can follow their distributions. Schematic anthropomorphs can be found in many parts of Europe with quite different and varied types from one region to another.

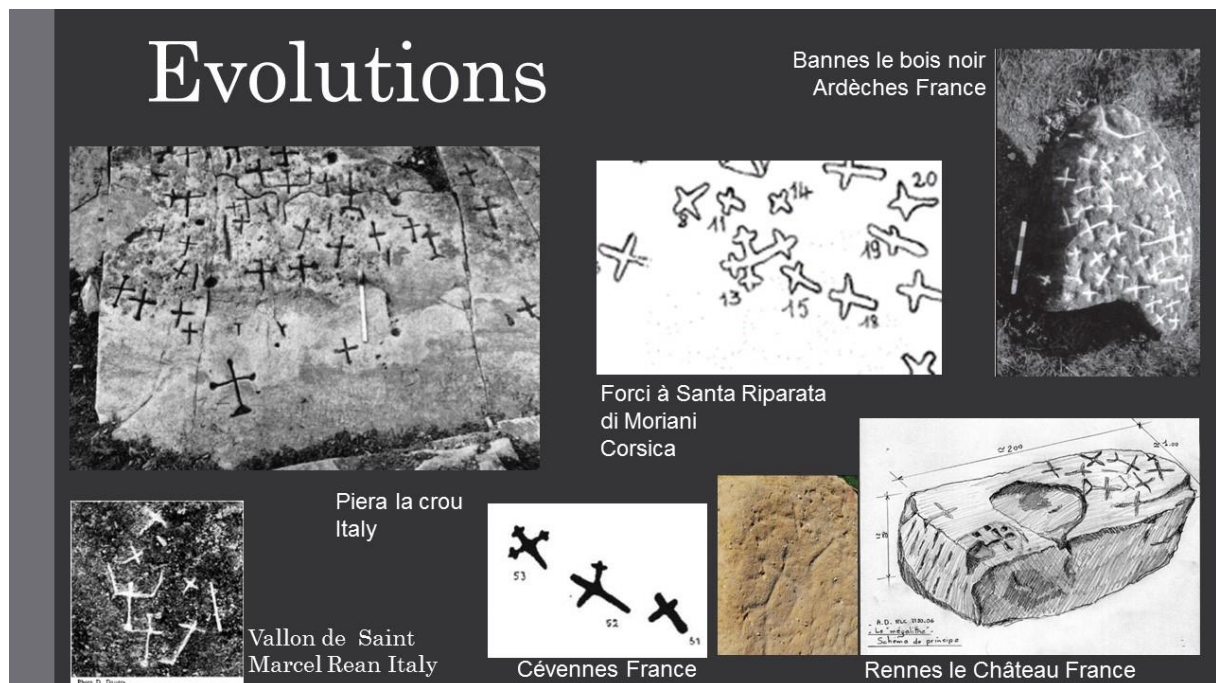


How to differentiate between historical crosses and previous cruciforms if there are any?

The historical crosses respond to certain imperative mental forms:

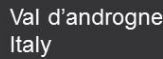
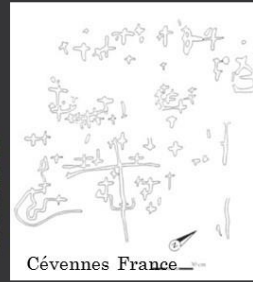
- the branches are rather perpendicular
- a vertical line greater or equal
- a horizontal line placed in the upper part for the Latin crosses
- a generally vertical drawing
- straight traits
- engravings made with metal tools

The basic design of the historical cross has given rise to many variants, but they still meet these fairly precise criteria. We have assumed that the engravings that do not fully meet these criteria are potential prehistoric cruciforms. Among these cases we find cruciforms, with little perpendicular crosses, loosely stalked, unconventional positions, with legs or sexual markings, ... or which coexist in number with anthropomorphs. These differentiations remain complicated, with very similar patterns persisting over all periods. In spite of that, by comparing a large number of engravings one arrives pretty well to recognize them and to distinguish them.

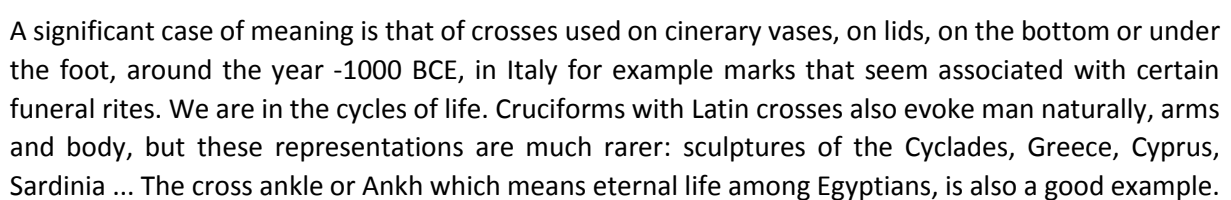


These prehistoric cruciforms may be particular anthropomorphs or rather signs carrying another semantic meaning: solar (Greek cross), deceased characters or souls (Latin crosses), they may have a different meaning from the anthropomorphous praying (they are not sexed), ...

Trèves  
France

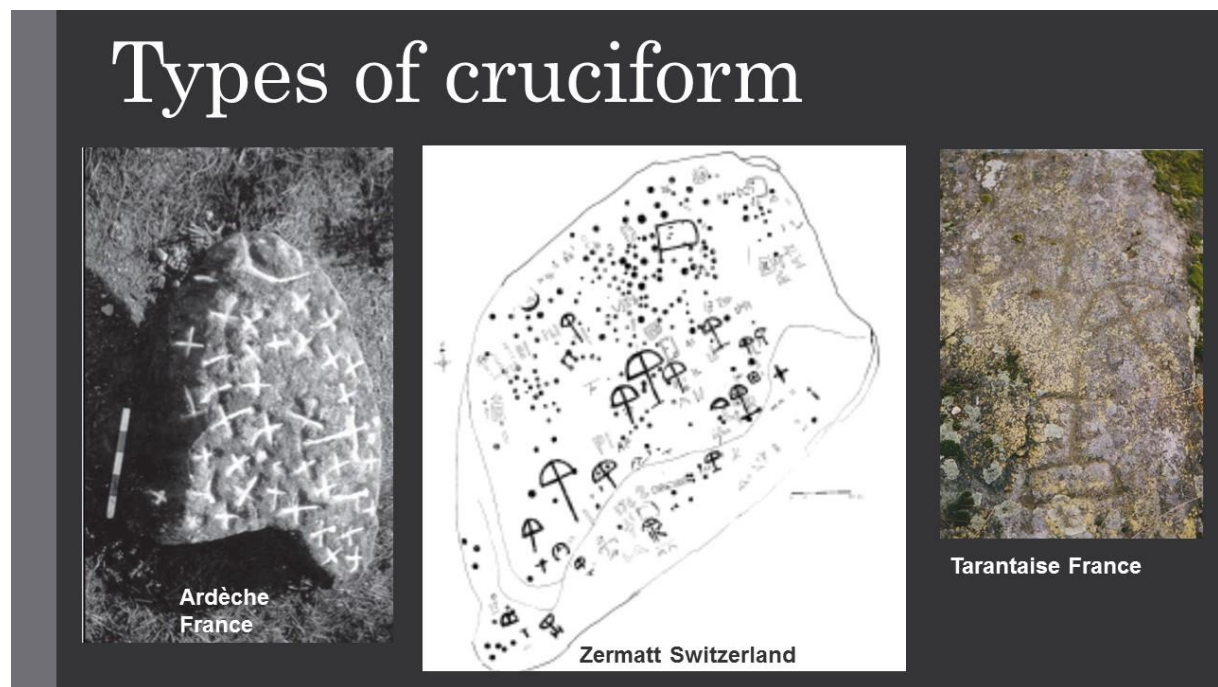


## Britania



## Anthropomorphic cruciform possible evolution

When we analyze the examples in Switzerland, we find a higher proportion of crosses (called Greek) with equal branches, not necessarily anthropomorphic. They are more like solar signs. In Italy, France and Spain, on the other hand, there are variations towards cruciform shapes that seem anthropomorphic. On some sites in Piedmont, Galicia, Leon several styles coexist. There are examples of possible evolutions from anthropomorphic to cruciform. There are probably several schools of thought depending on the region, but a near memory and semantic background. In all these cases the semantic meaning probably remains linked to the perpetuation of the cycle of life and soul, death, fertility, ...



## The cruciform variants

There are simple cruciforms, cruciform cupules, cruciform potencés, cruciform head (phi or crossbow), circled cruciforms, cruciform pedestals, ... There are also in lines or groups, ... The big problem is to be able to sort through all this, after 8000 years of engravings of all times. Some forms, such as those engraved with a crossbow, may be interpreted in different ways, similar to the anthropomorphs of Portugal and Spain, and are probably a variant of the types of prayers or cruciform, although other forms have also existed at historical periods. .

# Types of cruciform

Cross  
(Léon) Spain

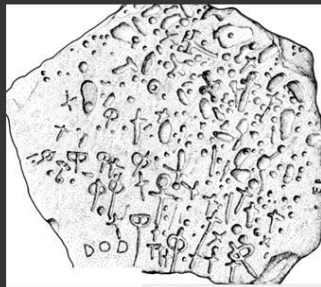


Solar Cross Ireland



Solar cross Island

Cross and anthropomorphic  
Ireland



Cross and anthropomorphic Spain

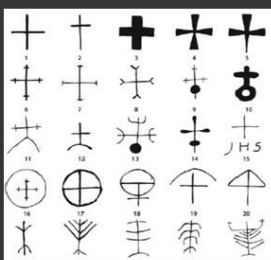
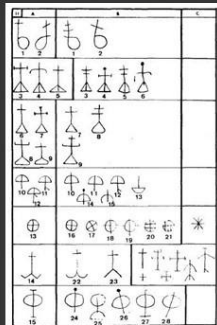


Figura 34. Grabados cruciformes de la Peña de la Albarca de Pozzodon (Teruel). Según P. Aslan (1985), modificado por los autores.

In the other European countries the cruciform engravings are much rarer, northern Spain is a region where there are many interesting models and complementary to those of the Alps, whose forms help us better understand their evolution. There are also some cases in Ireland, Macedonia and Serbia. Some links between Portugal, Spain, Ireland, are perceptible and shows possible maritime routes that were vectors of exchange of ideas and thoughts.

## Crosses

Cross Spain



Historical cross engraved  
on stone lintels Italy

Type	Savoie Pélissas sur Salin	Savoie Col de la Vanoise	Savoie Maurienne	Italie Traversella (TO)	Vall Sangone Roc d'Ural Italie	Inizio Vai da Checc Svizzera
Antropomorfo croix potence						
	Neolithique Craie d'une photo de Raphaël Escudier	Neolithique	Neolithique	Neolithique âge du Bronze	Neolithique	Neolithique
Haut Languedoc masif du Caroux	Cevennes Serra de l'arrel rocher aux croix	Forci à Santa Riparata di Morini Corse		Bouchouse la lusse Savoie Gwynne France	Mosogno, Tessin Suisse	
Antropomorfo croix potence autres variantes						
	Neolithique	Neolithique	Neolithique	Neolithique	Neolithique	Neolithique
Preonzo, Tessin Suisse	Sonogno, Tessin Suisse	Vogorno, Tessin Suisse	Monticolo di Darfo Italie	Bagnes Fionnay Suisse	Zwischbergen Suisse	
Antropomorfo croix potence autres variantes						
	Historique ?	Historique ?	Historique	Historique	Historique	Historique
Bregaglia Castasegna Suisse	Lumino, Tessin Suisse	Mergocia, Tessin Suisse	Loxemette Italie	Dumleachg Suisse	Valle Maggia Tessin Suisse	
	Historique	Historique	Historique ?	Historique ?	Historique	Historique

Certain neolithic and pre-Christian cruciform forms have been able to persist and influence the forms of historical crosses, and probably to favor the adoption of the Latin cross by Christianity in these regions, from the 5th century, allowing to take back some pre-existing forms which will be markers regional. Some forms of pre-existing crosses may have retained an esoteric meaning. This persistence of forms could mislead us. Many other examples of persistence exist: ankh sign, labyrinths, pregnant

tribes, swastika, ... If we take into account these elements and these hypotheses, we can have a very different look at the cruciform phenomenon.

## The relationship between cruciform and cup stone and its meaning

The studies I have carried out on cupules and existing syntheses tend more and more to associate them with the cult of ancestors, the cycle of life. Cruciforms are strongly associated with cupstones and probably have a similar or complementary meaning. My current analysis makes me think that it could be a shamanic practice related to the souls of the dead that is concerned. The meaning of the cross would probably evoke the meaning of life, the safeguarding and the rebirth of the soul.

Probably there were libations. The legends about these stones speak to us, of sacrifices, of fertility, and for the northern countries of fairies of elves, a reference to souls.

## The problem of dating methods


# Cruciform datation examples

Les pétroglyphes des phases I-II-III semblent pour la plupart obtenus par des outils en pierre, mais quelques exemplaires sont réalisés par la technique "en sillon", bien documentée dans les Alpes Piémontaises et comportant une gravure profonde à l'aide de marteau (ou masse) et ciseau, suivie par un polissage, probablement à l'aide d'une pierre, qui ne permet pas aux traces de piquetage de se conserver. Les pétroglyphes de la phase IV se détachent nettement des autres pour avoir été réalisés par des outils en fer et pour leur meilleur état de conservation.

**Leur datation**

Les deux dates — 1711 [?] et 1822 — permettent de renvoyer les phases I et IV respectivement aux XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> s. Leur présence est donc très significative, car elles donnent une idée assez précise du début et de la fin du phénomène étudié. Les phases II et III doivent donc dater du XVIII<sup>e</sup> s.

La plupart des pétroglyphes appartiennent aux phases I et III, les deux caractérisées par la prédominance de signes cruciformes simples et complexes et, deuxièmement, de signes en arbalète. Dans la phase I on observe aussi une figure assez rare parmi les pétroglyphes, reproduisant probablement un œil.



Queyras  
France

The methods used until now to date the cruciforms, are more than questionable and unscientific enough. They too often result in false dating, the dating is done on unreliable criteria.

- comparison of wear levels

The levels of wear are very dependent on the initial techniques of engraving, deep old engravings may seem less worn if they are compared to recent engravings less deep or very different techniques, and if these comparisons are not very attentive.

- comparison with other previous studies (partly false)

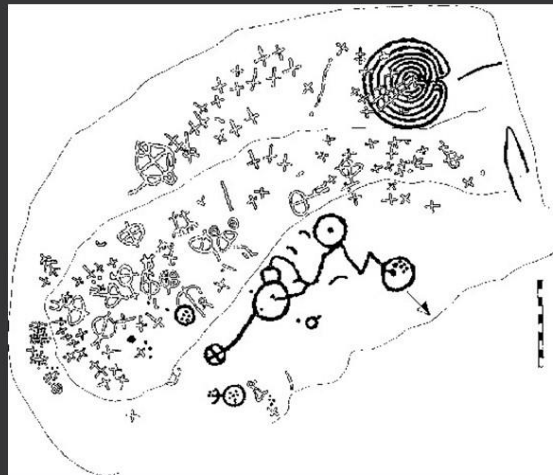
Studies can influence each other and feed over time an accepted fiction that becomes unavoidable. Some signs, such as crosses and crossbow shapes, are dated by evidence, and influence too strongly the overall verdict, while careful studies show that their meaning is quite different. In addition to a few engraved dates, it is sufficient for the whole to be standardized.

- comparison of types of engravings and drawings

Comparisons are made sometimes with very distant areas and with engravings of different cultures. We should redo these analyzes with more criteria and a better knowledge of the overall subject, which remains to be explored, to give less questionable references. It must be said that this subject is little studied as a whole. Another problem is that findings regarding cup stones during excavations are poorly reported, which does not help with dating and analysis.

The cruciform engraving methods and styles are very different from the picket techniques used at Mont Bego or Val Camonica for example. The cruciforms are made with deep engraving techniques with methods similar to those used to dig the cups. Engravings of cups and cruciforms are more scattered, less grouped and spread over larger areas, which makes more complex studies.

## Interesting example



Pedra Escrita Santa M<sup>a</sup> de Oia (Pontevedra) Castille Spain.

## Conclusion

My current hypothesis is that there was probably one or more particular cultures that developed towards the periods, from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age in part of Switzerland, Italy, France, Portugal and Spain partly sharing common beliefs, based on a background of older beliefs. These beliefs remained on the fringe of the new religions and evolved under their influence until the Middle Ages in marginal areas refuges. After the disappearance of these practices, some signs could again be used for occult practices, for a few centuries, because of their proximity to the Christian cross before disappearing.

These areas are particularly dense in engravings, more than a hundred major sites with cruciforms are distributed over these 5 countries, allowing more detailed overview studies. Common characteristics are found on all sites.

Special cases:

- in Switzerland we have a majority of Greek-style solar crosses,

- the south of the Massif Central, the Pyrenees, and Catalonia have developed cruciform and cupules related to raised stones or stone burials,
- for the Iberian Peninsula in the regions of Galicia and Leon, these beliefs would also be associated with labyrinths and concentric circles.
- For southern Spain these practices have existed on historic buildings in hidden areas.

This subject has been little considered by archaeologists of the late twentieth century, and especially with very strong prejudices, that we can understand, but have masked the reality of the phenomenon.

Pre-Christian cruciforms exist, they are very varied, this iconography has a strong symbolic meaning. The links with the cup stones are demonstrable. It is a very rich set: cups, channels, cruciform, U-shaped signs, solar signs, labyrinths, ... Some of these signs persisted at the beginning of the historical periods and were taken again later with other meanings for a more use esoteric in their appearance close to Christian signs, as some engravings of churches may suggest.

Existing databases should be unified at the European level, enriched and detailed, they are unique supports for progress. A network of specialists for these subjects in these different countries must be able to build up to develop synergies. Special attention of archaeologists on these topics should help to refine dating still too limited.

Cruciforms are the key to understanding many other topics. This is a new piece of the puzzle, to understand the beliefs of these times and it is a European specificity that deserves more research.

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